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FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1880
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHFL/AMCONSUL FLORENCE 3560
RUEHMIL/AMCONSUL MILAN 9947
RUEHNP/AMCONSUL NAPLES 3737

UNCLAS ROME 000392

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: ITALY SITREP: STRONG EARTHQUAKE HIT CENTRAL ITALY

Summary

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¶1. (SBU) On Monday morning an earthquake registering 5.8 on the Richter scale struck central Italy, centered about 60 miles from Rome near the capital of Abruzzo, L'Aquila. Initial reports indicate that 50 were killed and hundreds injured. The earthquake damaged L'Aquila's most important churches and monuments, and rendered 10-15 thousand buildings no longer habitable, according to the press. It was felt as far away as Rome and Naples, but no injuries were reported in those cities. Prime Minister Berlusconi canceled a planned trip to Moscow and declared a state of emergency. Thus far, no US citizens have been reported among the casualties. This morning the Charge D'Affaires called the Prime Minister's office to express condolences on behalf of the US Government, as well as offer disaster relief assistance. End Summary

Impact on US Citizens

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¶2. (SBU) As of 12:00 local time, we have no reports of American citizen casualties. Italian police and civil protection officials have told us there are no American citizens among the known dead or injured. They cautioned, however, that search and rescue is ongoing and that the number of casualties is expected to rise sharply. The consular section has been in contact with wardens in the area who also said they have not received reports of American citizen casualties. There are approximately 2,000 American citizens registered with the Embassy from the Abruzzo region. The Embassy has issued a warden message via e-mail and the Embassy website advising American citizens to avoid travel to the area and to monitor local media for emergency information.

¶3. (SBU) The Post Occupational Safety and Health Officer conducted an inspection of Embassy buildings this morning and found no problems. No Embassy personnel have been adversely impacted by the earthquake.

USG Offers of Assistance

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¶4. (SBU) On Monday morning the Charge D'Affaires called Marco Carnelos, Prime Minister Berlusconi's deputy diplomatic adviser, to offer the US government's condolences and ask what assistance the US government could offer. The Charge' also indicated that the Embassy would be providing \$50,000 immediately in disaster relief. Carnelos thanked the Charge' for this contribution and the sentiments. He added that for now, no assistance was necessary in terms of search and rescue teams, which Italy was already calling upon from around the country. Civil Defense head Guido Bertolaso indicated that offers for assistance had come in from the European Union, Russia, Germany, France, and other countries. For now, Bertolaso said, Italy had sufficient resources to deal with the tragedy, but if necessary, Italy would call on its friends.

¶5. (U) The Public Affairs section posted an expression of condolence on the Embassy website, and is prepared to answer reporters' inquiries about USG assistance. The Economic section is working with the USAID regional office in Budapest and USUN Rome to coordinate our response. A disaster declaration cable will follow septel that, once approved, will allow the USG to provide assistance to those affected.

GOI's Response

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¶6. (SBU) Berlusconi canceled a planned trip to Moscow, and instead will travel to L'Aquila to see the damage firsthand. Civil Defense head Guido Bertolaso called the earthquake the worst tragedy in 10 years, and said the country will have to mobilize its resources for weeks. This morning search and rescue crews, firemen, and other first responders were dispatched from around the country to L'Aquila. Although Abruzzo is known to be a seismic zone, Bertolaso said the earthquake was not predictable. The Rome-L'Aquila and Rome-Pescara highways are closed, and Infrastructure Minister Matteoli has called emergency meetings. Minister of Labor, Health, and Social Policies Sacconi is also holding an emergency meeting.

¶7. (U) Embassy Rome will continue to monitor the situation.
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